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SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY LEW-ROK VICE FOREIGN MINISTER

SHIN KAK-SOO MEETING

Classified By: EAP/K KURT TONG for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Republic of Korea (ROK) Vice Foreign Minister Shin Kak-soo met with Deputy Secretary Jacob Lew on April 6, 2009, on the margins of the Joint Session of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting and the Arctic Council. VFM Shin reiterated to the Deputy Secretary the ROK's commitment to tripling Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) to 0.25 percent of Gross National Income by 2015; noted that the ROK is increasing its assistance to Afghanistan; and confirmed that his colleagues in Seoul are committed to working with the USG to build a new U.S. Embassy facility. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) VFM Shin explained that the ROK ODA currently stands at 0.09 percent of GNI, but that the government plans to raise this to 0.15 percent of GNI by 2012 and 0.25 percent by 12015. The result would be annual ODA totaling about USD 3.3 billion. "The ROK is the only country to successfully transform from a recipient nation to a donor nation," VFM Shin said, noting that the ROK hopes to join the OECD's Development Assistance Committee in 2010. Shin stressed that despite the economic downturn, the ROK, the United States and other members of the global community must continue to focus on expanding support for developing economies.

13. (C) Deputy Secretary Lew stated that the United States "welcomes" the ROK as a donor nation, and highlighted that Afghanistan continues to require assistance to strengthen its national army and police forces and to create positive economic alternatives to joining the Taliban or other extremist groups. VFM Shin responded that the ROKG is currently reviewing its Afghanistan policy and noted that Korean Foreign Minister Yu attended the recent Afghanistan Donors' Conference at The Hague. He explained that the ROKG has informed the United States of its plan to strengthen the ROK effort in Afghanistan by training police and providing equipment (motorcycles and ambulances), and that the ROK will also expand its hospital services and vocational training. Throughout this process, VFM Shin said, the ROKG will continue to consult with the United States. VFM Shin also noted that the ROK's overseas development policy has traditionally emphasized human resource development, saying that it may be possible for the ROK to explore an expansion of its assistance to Afghanistan in the fields of health care and job training. Deputy Secretary Lew noted the importance of supporting programs in this area, specifically highlighting the significant impact health care initiatives have had on Afghanistan. In response to a question from EAP/K Director Kurt Tong, VFM Shin clarified that there are few legal restrictions on South Korean ODA, meaning that financial assistance could be provided directly to the Afghan military.

14. (C) Asked about the status of a New Embassy Compound in Seoul, VFM Shin said that his colleagues in Seoul are hard at work on finalizing a property exchange agreement for the construction of a new embassy. He said that it is important that the USG and the ROKG continue to cooperate on this project.

15. (C) Note: Following the meeting, VFM Shin noted to EAP/K's Tong that he was interested in proposing a regular bilateral dialogue with the United States on ODA and other global development issues. Tong noted that the idea might be worth exploring, especially in the run-up to the June 16 visit of ROK President Lee Myung-bak, and suggested that Shin might want to raise the idea with USAID Acting Administrator Alonzo Fulgham during a meeting to take place later the same day. End note.
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